DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 478 010 EA 032 613

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TITLE	Good Principals Are the Key to Successful Schools: Six Strategies To Prepare More Good Principals.
INSTITUTION	Southern Regional Education Board, Atlanta, GA.
SPONS AGENCY	Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, New York, NY.; DeWitt Wallace/Reader's Digest Fund, Pleasantville, NY.; Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	2003-00-00
NOTE	33p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Southern Regional Education Board, 592 10th St. N.W., Atlanta, GA 30318. Tel: 404-875-9211; Web site: http://www.sreb.org. For full text: http://www.sreb.org/programs/hstw/publications/pubs/03V03_GoodPrincipals.pdf.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom (055) -- Information Analyses (070)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Achievement; Administrator Characteristics; *Administrator Education; Administrator Qualifications; Administrators; Assistant Principals; Beginning Principals; Certification; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; *Instructional Leadership; Leadership Training; *Management Development; *Principals; *School Administration; School Supervision

ABSTRACT

This report defines six strategies that state and district leaders can employ to secure an ample supply of highly qualified school principals. The six strategies were drawn from research and direct experience in helping schools, universities, and state agencies rethink and redesign educational leadership programs. The six strategies are as follows: (1) Single out high performers; (2) recalibrate preparation programs; (3) emphasize real-world training; (4) link principal licensure to performance; (5) move accomplished teachers into school leadership positions; and (6) use state academies to cultivate leadership teams in middle-tier schools. For each strategy the report addresses five questions: What is the proposed strategy? What are the issues? Where do states now stand? What are some promising practices? and What can states do? The report concludes that each state should choose its best forum, based on the six proposed strategies, to train, recruit, and retain effective school principals. (WFA)

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ED 478 010

SREB

Good Principals Are the Key to Successful Schools:

Six Strategies to Prepare More Good Principals

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EA 032 613

EA EATR 0217

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Acknowledgments

This publication was prepared by Gene Bottoms, senior vice president; Kathy O'Neill, director, leadership initiative; Betty Fry, coordinator, higher education leadership; and David Hill, coordinator, leadership academy network.

This publication is supported by the Wallace Reader's Digest Funds, the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, and the Carnegie Foundation. The opinions expressed here do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of any of the funding entities, and no official endorsement should be inferred.

Good Principals Are the Key to Successful Schools:

Six Strategies to Prepare More Good Principals

If you want high-performing schools, hire principals who can lead them to success. It's a simple formula, and several decades of solid research have proved that it works. So why don't states and school districts do it more often?

The obvious answer is that states don't have enough high-quality principals to go around. Despite what we know about the critical role of the principal, states continue to support principal preparation and licensing policies that never will produce a steady supply of high-performing leaders.

Some schools are lucky enough to have excellent principals. What's missing is a reliable leadership development system that takes *luck* out of the equation — a system that identifies, recruits and develops people who have proven records of raising student performance and closing achievement gaps.

It makes no sense for policymakers to create high-stakes systems for school accountability and then gamble that every struggling school will find a high-performing principal who:

- understands which school and classroom practices improve student achievement;
- knows how to work with teachers to bring about positive change;
- supports teachers in carrying out instructional practices that help all students succeed; and
- can prepare accomplished teachers to become principals.

In today's hit-or-miss leadership development environment, principals of this caliber are scarce. They constitute our real principal shortage.

The principal supply

In the 16 Southern Regional Education Board states, school district leaders frequently report that the supply of principals is diminishing rapidly. However, the problem is not a lack of *certified* principals but rather a lack of *qualified* principals. *Every* state has plenty of people with certificates as school administrators. *No* state has plenty of people with the knowledge and skills to lead schools to excellence.

In the last four years, Texas has certified more than 7,000 school administrators — enough to replace every school principal in the state. Georgia has 3,200 people who are cer-

tified as principals but who do not hold that position; there are 1,946 schools in Georgia. Other SREB states also are oversupplied with principal candidates. Yet one large urban district recently reviewed 35 certified applicants for a principal vacancy at a high school, and ***not one*** met the district's criteria and needs.

Certification, as it exists today, is not proof of quality.

Why are there so many administrators who are certified but not qualified? The explanation is rooted in university and state certification practices. Many "certified administrators" are teachers who have earned master's degrees in school administration but who do not intend to become principals. These teachers considered the administration degree the easiest route to master's-level pay.

Other teachers who earn administrative credentials may want to become school principals but lack leadership qualities. Still others may have potential to be principals, but their university preparation programs did not provide them with the knowledge and skills required to succeed as leaders in today's high-pressure, achievement-based accountability environment.

The bottom line is that states and school systems have no assurance that those with principal credentials are prepared to develop and lead high-achieving schools. Without an effective leader in every school, the SREB states will be hard-pressed to meet the need for a highly skilled 21st century work force.

The goal: Leadership for results

SREB recognizes that effective leaders are critical if all students are to achieve at high levels. The SREB leadership goal (*Goals for Education, 2002*)[1] is — and must be — ambitious: "Every school has leadership that results in improved student performance — and leadership begins with an effective school principal."

Let's stress the words "*every school.*" Capable school leaders too often migrate to the most favorable school settings. Struggling schools find high-quality principals in short supply, and these are the schools that need them the most. High-need schools often are characterized by lower salaries, a lack of local support and a weak professional climate. The best leaders, who usually have many principalships from which to choose, seldom opt to work in high-need schools.

SREB aims to help states change how they identify, prepare, certify and support school leaders. The goal is to create a system that allows every school, no matter how challenged, to draw from a deep pool of highly skilled principals who know how to lead, collaborate and get results.

Six strategies

In an April 2001 report, *Preparing a New Breed of School Principals: It's Time for Action*, SREB proposed actions that every state and every school district can take to secure an ample supply of highly qualified principals. This report defines six strategies that state and local leaders can use to achieve that result. To compile these six strategies, SREB drew from research and — most importantly — from direct experiences in helping schools, universities and state agencies rethink and redesign educational leadership programs.

[1] *Goals for Education: Challenge to Lead* is available on the SREB Web site at www.sreb.org.

Strategy 1: Single out high-performers. Stop relying on the questionable pool of "self-selected" people with administrative credentials but little inclination or talent for leadership. Instead, develop criteria and methods to choose high-quality candidates for leadership preparation. Tap those with a demonstrated knowledge of curriculum and instruction as well as a passion for helping students meet high standards.

Strategy 2: Recalibrate preparation programs. Redesign leadership preparation programs to emphasize the core functions of the high-achieving school: curriculum, instruction and student achievement.

Strategy 3: Emphasize real-world training. Make field-based experiences a high priority and a central focus of principal preparation programs.

Strategy 4: Link principal licensure to performance. Create a two-tier licensure system for school principals. For *initial licensure* candidates would have to complete a preparation program focused on the core functions of successful schools. Within a specified time, those with initial licenses would have to earn *professional licenses* by demonstrating that they can lead improvements in school and classroom practices and in student achievement.

Strategy 5: Move accomplished teachers into school leadership positions. Create an alternative certification program that provides a high level of support for accomplished teachers who are interested in becoming principals. This program would enable them to bypass traditional preparation and to prove themselves on the job. Limit participation in such programs to teachers with master's degrees, demonstrated leadership skills and proven records of increasing student achievement.

Strategy 6: Use state academies to cultivate leadership teams in middle-tier schools.[2] Schools that rely on leadership *teams*, rather than on single-leader models, are most likely to improve student learning and "grow" future principals. Create state leadership academies that will cultivate school-based leadership teams and will help these leaders develop the skills and knowledge to promote effective practices that will raise student achievement. Concentrate on serving *middle-tier* schools, which have lagging academic performance but rarely qualify for special assistance from state and federal programs.

For each strategy, this document will address five questions:

- What is the proposed strategy?
- What are the issues?
- Where do states now stand?
- What are some promising practices?
- What can states do?

[2]Middle-tier schools are those that are functioning just above the lowest-performing schools, but their performance is not in the top half of schools in the state. There are many schools in this group.

Strategy 1: Single out high-performers.

Stop relying on the questionable pool of "self-selected" people with administrative credentials but little inclination or talent for leadership. Instead, develop criteria and methods to choose high-quality candidates for leadership preparation. Tap those with a demonstrated knowledge of curriculum and instruction as well as a passion for helping students meet high standards.

"Tapping" involves working to identify high-performers for development as school principals. This identification effort requires that states, local districts and universities develop credible methods to recruit potential principals who have records of accomplishment with students, leadership skills, a passion to improve student achievement, and the ability to communicate effectively with teachers, students, parents and the community.

What are the issues?

Self-selection doesn't work. States and most districts currently do not make efforts to identify people with great promise as future leaders. They rely instead on a "volunteer pool" of people with administrative credentials but insufficient preparation to lead schools. Districts increasingly are dissatisfied with these self-selected candidates. District leaders often search in vain for candidates who can demonstrate their ability to raise student achievement and lead others to improve teaching and learning.

Where are the high-performers? Many are busy helping students succeed. They are focused on their work and give little thought to moving from the classrooms into formal leadership positions.

The traditional path to becoming a principal has been to become an assistant principal first. Many highly capable teachers avoid this path because they see the assistant principal position as being too far removed from curriculum and instruction. Assistant principals often are seen as being in charge of discipline, bus duty, book inventory, cleaning supplies, schedules — everything except instructional leadership. Only when principals view the assistant principalship as a training ground for future principals does the position mirror the principals' work and allow the apprentice leaders to play a key role in academic achievement.

Progressive districts are discovering that a formal process for identifying those with potential to be good principals can encourage high-performing teachers to pursue administrative credentials. This formal recruitment process may include incentives such as tuition grants and priority for leadership positions. However, while districts can identify promising candidates, district leaders typically have little influence over the formal preparation that these candidates receive.

University admissions criteria are out of sync. Universities determine whom to admit to master's degree programs in leadership and thus control the pool of potential principals. Universities rely mostly on traditional selection criteria: undergraduate grade-point averages, scores on admissions tests and recommendations from employers. These criteria may indicate whether someone will succeed in graduate school, but they offer few clues about his or her aptitude for success as a leader in an elementary, middle or high school.

School districts and universities need to work together to select candidates for leadership preparation programs. This partnership needs to recognize the vested interests of both sides and their mutual accountability for the quality of leaders produced by the programs.

A shared selection process would give school districts a key role in establishing criteria and procedures for identifying and preparing new leaders to meet local needs. Under such a system, the admissions process would include an in-depth analysis of the applicant's professional accomplishments and his or her demonstrated leadership. Districts would provide graduate students with release time, tuition assistance, experienced mentors and the promise that, if they are successful, they will be considered for and supported in important leadership roles.

Where do states now stand?

No SREB state has a statewide program for selecting, screening and training future principals to lead high-achieving schools. Most school districts and universities still rely on the ineffective system of self-selection.

While none of the 16 SREB states has made great strides, six (Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia) seem to be moving toward higher standards for the selection of future principals.

What are some promising practices?

While no state has comprehensive policies or practices that ensure a high-quality pool of principal candidates, some state and local initiatives contain elements of a comprehensive system.

Kentucky's Highly Skilled Educators Program assists low-performing schools as they work to raise student achievement. The process used to select expert mentors for this program includes features adaptable to a system for tapping potential leaders. Each candidate must provide a performance portfolio, participate in a group interview and be observed working in a school setting. Participants are screened carefully to determine their ability to work with others to improve achievement in low-performing schools.

The University of North Texas (a member of the SREB University Leadership Development Network) and the Dallas Independent School District are piloting a program to identify and recruit future principals. Last spring the school district asked 10 outstanding principals to nominate high-performing teachers for possible admission into UNT's graduate leadership program. The district and university evaluated each nominated teacher on criteria that included:

- evidence of using professional development, student achievement data and technology to improve his or her teaching;
- evidence of working with others to improve school and classroom practices; and
- candidates' assessments of personal qualities that would make them effective school leaders. Candidates described classroom strategies they used to overcome barriers to student achievement, recounted risks that they took to improve their teaching, presented evidence of their communication skills and explained how they would adjust their schedules to complete the program.

The candidates also were expected to meet the university's traditional requirements for graduate admissions. At the end of the nomination and evaluation process, the selection team (composed of representatives from the university and the district) chose 27 teachers. The Dallas school system agreed to pay half of these teachers' tuition and to provide training and stipends for mentor principals who work in the program. (Principals with a track record of improving student achievement were chosen as mentor principals and serve as partners with the university in preparing future school leaders.)

Eligible school districts in Mississippi can receive state funds to develop new administrators. The funds support one-year paid sabbaticals for qualified teachers who participate full time in a state-approved principal preparation program at a university. Candidates agree to serve as administrators in their sponsoring school districts for at least five years. To gain admission into a university program, each candidate must complete a portfolio that demonstrates evidence of successful teaching, leadership ability, interpersonal skills, personal development activities and written communication skills.

South Carolina's Principal Assessment Center helps local school districts screen candidates for the entry-level skills that the state considers essential in effective school leaders.

What can states do?

Develop criteria and screening processes to identify and recruit potential principals.

Large districts may set up their own, but smaller districts probably will need state assistance in developing criteria and processes for identifying and recruiting future leaders. The screening could include an application, a portfolio with evidence of professional performance, a structured interview, and several assessments to measure leadership potential, general decision-making skills and other personal traits.

Develop and disseminate ideas for identifying and recruiting future principals.

States can prepare and disseminate materials to promote school principals' important role in an accountability system focused on student achievement. These materials can share ideas about ways for districts to identify promising candidates to be school leaders.

Encourage districts and universities to work together to select candidates for graduate programs in leadership.

If states expect to create a pool of highly qualified potential principals, leaders at universities and school districts together must support higher standards for admission into principal preparation programs. States can provide incentives such as grants or stipends that will encourage such partnerships and that will take into account each university's need to maintain a stable enrollment during the transition to higher standards.

Support those who have been selected for principal preparation.

States and districts can offer promising principal candidates several types of support:

- release time for training and on-the-job learning experiences;
- stipends for university tuition; and
- expert mentors and coaches.

Strategy 2: Recalibrate preparation programs.

Redesign leadership preparation programs to emphasize the core functions of the high-achieving school: curriculum, instruction and student achievement.

Before states can increase their supply of high-quality principals, they must adopt standards for leadership preparation that emphasize the school's core functions. New leadership standards must shift away from the traditional preoccupation with school management and must put the highest priority on results for students.

University courses and field-based learning opportunities need to be redesigned with one focus: student achievement. Graduates of preparation programs — and the programs themselves — must be assessed using performance standards tied directly to student achievement. University systems contain many disincentives to change, so states need to create external incentives — including technical assistance and program audits — that can help break down the resistance to reform.

What are the issues?

"Redesign" means just that. Redesigning leadership preparation programs does not mean simply rearranging old courses — as staff at some universities and leadership academies are inclined to do. True redesign requires a new curriculum framework and new courses aimed at producing principals who can lead schools to excellence. Institutions that are unwilling to do the hard work of redesign should not be preparing principals.

The university curriculum is out of balance. Most master's degree programs for principal preparation require students to complete about 36 credit-hours or 12 semester courses. These courses are heavy on theory and light on actual practice. They generally give equal attention to the topics of management, supervision, finance, school law, leadership and research. Many universities offer only one course on curriculum and instruction, and that course usually deals with those topics in theory, not practice. Leading improvement in student achievement receives little — if any — attention.

Creating courses centered on improving student achievement can bring some much-needed balance to the academic and the clinical approaches to preparing school leaders. In a balanced program, aspiring principals would read research reports and scholarly works and would write about and reflect on ways to apply research-based practices in schools. Highly skilled educators — trained mentors — would guide them as they use what they have learned to address real problems in schools.

Future principals need to get hands-on experience by working with school leadership teams as they investigate achievement gaps and work to solve them. The aspiring leaders would get practice in planning and initiating changes in curricula, teaching practices, student support services and school organization. By working on real problems and witnessing the results of strategic interventions, they would acquire the practical knowledge and understanding that are impossible to duplicate in lecture courses.

Effective preparation requires partnership. Implementing a real-world, problem-based curriculum requires a shift from exclusive ownership by the university faculty to sharing with school district personnel the responsibility for developing this curriculum. School leaders and master teachers can help university faculty identify the most useful theories and

research and link this academic knowledge to problems that really exist in schools. Principals and teachers with track records of performance can help craft challenging course assignments and performance assessments. Regular interactions among faculty and practitioners also can lead to school-based research projects that satisfy the scholarly demands placed on faculty and that benefit teachers and principals.

Shared ownership of principal preparation programs will expand and alter the roles of both partners. University faculty will spend more time teaching in the field, and districts will have to accept more responsibility for the quality of program graduates. Partnerships between universities and school districts also will require both parties to allocate resources to support joint planning time for key staff and faculty, travel expenses to meet together regularly, and compensation for people chosen and trained as mentor principals.

Who "owns" leadership preparation courses? Many faculty members claim ownership of specific courses in their universities' leadership preparation programs. This ownership issue is a major barrier to the shared planning that is necessary in order to design and implement a principal preparation program based on new standards.

Faculty members who claim ownership for courses often control course content almost exclusively, with no input from others about the courses' relevance to the program as a whole. This approach to program design and delivery thwarts the development of a comprehensive, cohesive and consistent curriculum that provides adequate, integrated treatment of all standards.

Courses with identical titles sometimes have very different content, and different instructors provide very different learning experiences for students. Without a performance-based curriculum design, university programs cannot guarantee that all students who complete certain courses will meet the new, priority standards dealing with curriculum and instruction.

Universities and school districts must ask the hard questions. Genuine redesign of principal preparation programs goes beyond tinkering with course syllabi. University faculty and their partners in school districts need to address several important issues:

- How much time is needed for priority topics and how deeply should they be studied?
- What challenging assignments based on schools' real instructional problems will the program include?
- What field-based experiences will enable potential leaders to observe and practice leadership work with guidance from expert mentors?
- What performance assessments will ensure that aspiring principals can work with others to improve curriculum and instructional practices?
- How can the preparation program's faculty and its delivery of instruction best be organized to implement an integrated academic and field-based approach?

Effectively redesigning a program requires university leadership departments to adopt a philosophy of continuous improvement. Continuous improvement involves collecting and analyzing data on the effectiveness of the curriculum design and on the graduates' performance. The design should be refined and improved further based on these data.

Where do states now stand?

All SREB states have made some progress in adopting curriculum and instruction standards for preparing school leaders. Standards are important guides to quality but do not *guarantee* quality. Most states and universities have "addressed new standards" by matching old course titles and content to new expectations. On paper, this strategy "aligns" courses and standards. In reality, it results in little or no change.

There is little reason to believe that principal preparation programs that have moved to new state standards are producing graduates who are more capable of leading school improvement and raising student achievement. States need different strategies to bring about real change.

What are some promising practices?

Although there are few good examples of principal preparation programs that have been redesigned well, some promising practices are emerging among the institutions in SREB's University Leadership Development Network.

East Tennessee State University got outside help in "unwrapping" state standards for its leadership program. The faculty sought out a curriculum specialist known for translating higher curriculum standards into successful practice in K-12 classrooms. This specialist is working full time with university faculty for several months to develop leadership courses that emphasize curriculum and instruction.

Oklahoma State University's new program design incorporates 12 semester-hours of instructional leadership coursework (four times the number of credit-hours typically devoted to this critical area). Staff from two urban school districts help OSU faculty ensure that problem-based learning activities focus on issues related to achievement gaps.

The school administration faculty at the University of North Texas are aligning course content, student assignments and assessments with state standards. Faculty members are team-teaching the leadership courses, ensuring an array of expertise in order to address all standards and topics in depth.

The Delaware State Department of Education is contracting with outside teams to audit university programs. These teams are well-versed in university leadership curricula and are experienced in developing standards-based programs. Each team consists of a superintendent, a principal and two nationally recognized experts. The purpose of the audit is to accelerate the shift from a school management curriculum to an instructional leadership curriculum.

SREB University Leadership Development Network

The University Leadership Development Network aims to design, deliver and evaluate a principal preparation program that emphasizes comprehensive school improvement and improved student achievement and that can be adopted by other colleges and universities. SREB expects each institution that participates in the network to design a school leadership preparation program with strong ties to the standards and goals of the state's accountability system.

Every university in the network agrees to:

- create an advisory board — made up of faculty, business leaders, exemplary principals, representatives of the state education department, and other school leaders with diverse backgrounds who represent a range of schools and school systems — that meets regularly to help design the program;
- plan learning experiences in which leadership candidates apply research-based knowledge as part of the following:
  - solving real problems faced by schools;
  - focusing on the core functions of the school, including instruction and student learning; and
  - engaging in well-planned internships that are integrated throughout the preparation program and that provide aspiring leaders with master leaders who mentor them and help them practice their skills;
- create a preparation program that can be customized for students based on their experience in providing leadership while serving in other positions;
- provide faculty, educators and others with broad, research-based knowledge, and redesign university leadership preparation to emphasize school-based learning;
- contribute staff time and expertise to design, develop and field-test leadership training modules that address real problems principals must solve and that involve real learning experiences in schools — and get faculty to work in teams to teach these modules;
- provide faculty with the time they need to conduct research in schools and to participate in an ongoing evaluation process to determine the revised program's effectiveness in preparing leaders who can increase student learning and improve schools;
- realign the advancement and reward system for faculty to accept their work in schools as part of tenure and promotion requirements;
- join with school districts in developing a process to identify people with demonstrated leadership ability, knowledge of curriculum and instruction, and proven records of high performance;
- allocate additional time, resources and staffing to coordinate, develop and implement a new curriculum for preparing school leaders; and
- solicit waivers from state agencies as needed to address certification issues that are barriers to the preparation of future school leaders.

What can states do?

Encourage universities to adapt the SREB redesign conditions and strategies as they revise principal preparation programs.

SREB has learned that most universities will need outside assistance in redesigning principal preparation programs. The appropriate state agency can encourage university presidents to participate in a program redesign initiative. SREB's work with 11 universities focuses on creating principal preparation programs that emphasize curriculum, instruction and student achievement; states can promote this approach among their universities.

Each state needs to select a knowledgeable person to head the redesign initiative. This person would meet with teams from participating institutions to do the following:

- help them develop a redesign work plan;
- share information about other institutions' efforts;
- consider what changes will be required in order to achieve each element of the redesign;
- study the best ways to work with local school districts; and
- help them network with other university teams to learn from one another.

The state also could form inter-institutional study teams to solve common problems, such as balancing academic and field-based preparation.

"We at Clemson University have been involved in the SREB principal preparation initiative for about a year and will implement a redesigned principal preparation program in the summer of 2003. This endeavor has caused us to examine and reorganize our curricular offerings. Perhaps the most immediate benefit is that we are coordinating our curriculum around a programmatic theme of leadership for improving school and classroom practices and student achievement — something we have needed to do for years. Further, the SREB Leadership Initiative provides the opportunity to systematically address both the knowledge and performance aspects of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards, particularly those related to curriculum and instruction — again, something we have needed to do. Our first courses will apply the most current and best research in the field of leadership to the preparation of people to lead school improvement. Not only will this benefit our students, but also the theme will provide a rich core of research for our faculty. Our curriculum will become a source of — and dissemination outlet for — knowledge development."
Russ Marion, Professor of Educational Leadership, Clemson University

Approve preparation programs based on hard-nosed external curriculum and program reviews.

A thoughtful external curriculum and program review process can spur the leadership faculty to move beyond matching course titles to standards and claiming that the program complies. A rigorous external review would examine the extent to which redesigned leadership courses emphasize the principal's role in curriculum, instruction and student achievement. The review would look for evidence that the leadership program has incorporated problem-solving assignments, performance assessments that are aligned with state standards, and a substantial amount of field-based practice in schools.

The appropriate state agency should develop a hard-nosed external review process, including:

- program assessment guidelines that emphasize the main objective: preparing school principals who can address the core functions of the school;
- benchmarks for evaluating the degree to which course content has been redesigned around the core functions of the school;
- criteria for measuring the quality of the preparation program's field-based learning experiences;
- selection guidelines for external review teams (for example, team members should understand standards-based course design, research-based school and classroom practices, and the principal's role in leading change);
- indicators (including measures of resource commitments) to determine the quality of the university's relationship with local school districts as they work together to select and prepare future school principals;
- criteria for gauging the readiness of the university leadership faculty to prepare a new generation of school principals; and
- an evaluation to determine whether the reward system for faculty now recognizes faculty members for doing scholarly research in schools.

Fund university/district partnerships that are aimed specifically at designing principal preparation programs to support low-performing schools.

States can fund partnerships between universities and high-need local districts that work well together in focusing on curriculum, instruction and standards. The funding should be based on a proposal — jointly prepared by the university and the school district — that describes the expected results and addresses how the partnership will prepare school leaders who can close achievement gaps in low-performing schools. The proposal also should describe how the program will be initiated and how faculty will be involved and rewarded for their efforts. Additional resources required should be stated in the proposal. First-year funding would be for planning; subsequent funding should be based on evidence of a strong partnership, a truly redesigned program and the reallocation of existing resources.

The funding should support tuition assistance, internships, the involvement of mentor principals, and release time so that professors and aspiring principals can engage in meaningful work in the schools.

Reward universities and principal preparation programs that value teaching and research as part of hands-on learning experiences in schools.

University faculty in principal preparation programs need incentives to recognize and utilize the rich opportunities for teaching and research in schools. Many faculty members do not believe that their work in schools is valued within the university. Institutions need to appreciate and reward faculty members' scholarly work in schools that helps prepare future principals who can lead school improvement.

Encourage universities to hire new faculty who know how to lead school change and involve them in preparing school principals.

State legislatures can fund endowed positions for universities to employ faculty with expertise in research-based school practices and classroom practices and with experience in leading school change. These new faculty members should be accomplished leaders with records of success in raising student achievement. They can help design and refocus courses to combine theory with practice.

Align state standards for principal preparation with state standards for principal evaluation.

Some states have developed standards for assessing school leaders' on-the-job performance. Often these evaluation standards emphasize curriculum, instruction and student achievement much more than do the standards for principal preparation that universities are expected to meet. Policymakers in these states are sending a garbled message. They're telling principals that they will be judged on student achievement, but they're telling leadership preparation programs that student achievement is no more important than school law or management. By aligning the two sets of standards, states will make clear what they expect from university leadership programs.

How Can We Prepare the High-performing Principals Schools Need?

An Action Checklist for States

To build the pool of high-achieving principal candidates, states can …

- ❑ Develop criteria and screening processes to identify and recruit potential principals.
- ❑ Develop and disseminate ideas for identifying and recruiting future principals.
- ❑ Encourage districts and universities to work together to select candidates for graduate programs in leadership.
- ❑ Support those who have been selected for principal preparation.

To accelerate the redesign of principal preparation programs, states can …

- ❑ Encourage universities to adapt the SREB redesign conditions and strategies as they revise principal preparation programs.
- ❑ Approve preparation programs based on hard-nosed external curriculum and program reviews.
- ❑ Fund university/district partnerships that are aimed specifically at designing principal preparation programs to support low-performing schools.
- ❑ Reward universities and principal preparation programs that value teaching and research as part of hands-on learning experiences in schools.
- ❑ Encourage universities to hire new faculty who know how to lead school change and involve them in preparing school principals.
- ❑ Align state standards for principal preparation with state standards for principal evaluation.

To make field-based experiences a central focus of principal preparation programs, states can …

- ❑ Approve principal preparation programs only if they include significant amounts of school-based learning.
- ❑ Provide grants to support school-based learning in principal preparation programs.
- ❑ Make clinical teaching and work in schools part of the job for leadership faculty and include such work in the faculty reward system.
- ❑ Create standards and training programs for mentor principals.

To link principal licensure to performance, states can ...

- ❑ Establish a two-tier, performance-based licensure processes for school principals.
- ❑ Provide support systems — through state leadership academies and universities — to help school leaders earn professional licenses.
- ❑ Develop reliable, valid assessments of principals' on-the-job performance.

To move accomplished teachers into principal positions, states can ...

- ❑ Create alternative processes for principal licensure that allow master teachers to qualify for initial licenses.
- ❑ Develop procedures for screening candidates and awarding initial licenses to those who complete alternative routes to become principals.
- ❑ Establish support systems for those who become principals through alternative routes.

To sharpen the focus of state leadership academies and cultivate leadership teams in middle-tier schools, states can ...

- ❑ Create leadership academies that target middle-tier schools with poor academic performance.
- ❑ Select knowledgeable, experienced people to be instructors, coaches and mentors in leadership academies.
- ❑ Ask state leadership academies, universities and licensure agencies to develop plans to allow training in the academies to count toward initial principal certification.
- ❑ Determine the effectiveness of leadership academies by measuring whether those trained through them are able to improve school practices and student achievement.

Strategy 3: Emphasize real-world training.

Make field-based experiences a high priority and a central focus of principal preparation programs.

Most promising principal candidates enter leadership preparation programs with their eyes open. They recognize the challenges that school leaders face and the importance of acquiring practical skills and knowledge to meet those challenges. Research shows that current principals believe the most valuable components of their training were well-designed field experiences that provided opportunities to do the following:

- observe effective school leaders;
- practice school leadership by working with others to solve specific problems with curriculum and instruction; and
- interact with university faculty who have both practical and research-based knowledge of effective school practices.

Field experiences may include opportunities to "shadow" principals as they go about their daily work, but high-quality field-based learning also includes a great deal of hands-on involvement. If aspiring principals are to develop the skills to do the real work of instructional leadership, they need many opportunities to engage in that work under the supervision of expert mentors. Field-based practice needs to be incorporated throughout a leadership preparation program.

What are the issues?

Integrating school-based learning requires negotiation. Most principal preparation programs offer field-based learning as a "capstone" experience at or near the end of leadership training. As universities and school districts work together to redesign curricula, the challenge is to make school-based learning a regular, continuous part of an aspiring principal's preparation. A properly redesigned program will blend rigorous academic learning with field projects that require leadership students to apply their learning in the real world.

Integrating high-quality field experiences into a revitalized, results-oriented curriculum is a difficult task that only the strongest university/district partnerships will accomplish. *The work requires purposeful negotiation by top-level district and university administrators — those who are responsible for carrying out the institutional mission and are authorized to make decisions about staffing and resource allocation.* These decision-makers together must choose schools where master principals will work with university leadership faculty to identify significant problems with student achievement. Decision-makers then must create opportunities for aspiring principals and their professors to work closely with schools' leadership teams to solve these problems.

A new curriculum means new investments. High-quality, field-based curricula require significant investments by universities and school districts. Universities need to find ways to evaluate and reward faculty members who spend considerable time working in the field. School districts need to encourage and support future principals by underwriting release time for academic study and field-based learning. Effective university/district partnerships also need to share certain costs. For example, partners can pool resources to identify, prepare and compensate master principals who serve as mentors.

Patrick B. Forsyth, Williams Professor of Educational Leadership at Oklahoma State University, is working with the Tulsa and Oklahoma City school districts to redesign and deliver a principal preparation program that emphasizes field-based learning and that focuses on curriculum and instruction. Forsyth says the work involves two major expenses.

The first, he says, is the time-consuming phase of start-up planning, which requires universities to release faculty from all or part of their teaching loads while they work with district and school leaders to design new courses, assignments, materials and assessments. Forsyth estimates these costs at $30,000 to $50,000 during the first start-up. Start-ups for subsequent partnerships with other districts should cost less as the leadership department restructures to accommodate a field-centered curriculum.

Adding a strong clinical component to the principal preparation program is another major expense, Forsyth says, because the university must engage highly accomplished educators as adjunct professors and field-based mentors. He estimates that this expense will equal about 25 percent of the university's existing budget for a principal preparation program. If universities make improved principal preparation a priority, Forsyth suggests, they can pay part of these expenses by attracting additional funding from school districts, targeted state appropriations, and local businesses and foundations.

Where do states now stand?

SREB states' progress toward policies that ensure high-quality, field-based learning experiences is modest at best. Only Arkansas and Texas require every leadership program to include a well-planned, integrated series of field-based learning experiences. Two states have taken no action at all. Twelve states require some type of school-based internship but do not define clearly the standards for this experience. The internship typically occurs at the end of the program and is not integrated throughout the curriculum.

What are some promising practices?

SREB's work with universities in the SREB University Leadership Development Network suggests that a genuine university/district partnership — which includes shared responsibility for planning and funding — can produce a coherent series of field-based experiences that begin early in the program and continue throughout it.

For example, Oklahoma State University and two urban school districts — Tulsa and Oklahoma City — work together to design school-based learning experiences. Aspiring principals work with school improvement teams for half a day per week during four of the program's five semesters. The University of North Texas is working closely with the Dallas Independent School District to provide leaders-in-training with a continuous series of school-based experiences. Ten successful urban principals serve as mentors to these aspiring leaders as they work to solve real problems that schools face.

What can states do?

Approve principal preparation programs only if they include significant amounts of school-based learning.

States can adopt criteria for program approval that require all principal preparation programs to include formal field-based learning experiences. The criteria would specify the qualifications of school-based mentors, the range and quality of school-based learning experiences, and methods of assessing program participants' progress in leadership, curriculum and knowledge of effective practices in the school and classroom.

Provide grants to support school-based learning in principal preparation programs.

States can provide grants to universities that agree to invest more in high-quality, school-based learning experiences for future principals. These grants should be allocated specifically for the following purposes:

- redesigning the program around high-quality, school-based learning experiences;
- establishing adequate faculty positions to support this redesign;
- devising and implementing teaching materials, assignments and assessments associated with school-based experiences;
- building partnerships with school districts for leadership preparation; and
- developing protocols and implementing processes for selecting, preparing and supporting highly qualified school leaders to serve as mentors.

Make clinical teaching and work in schools part of the job for leadership faculty and include such work in the faculty reward system.

States should develop program standards that require university presidents to include high-quality field experiences and internships for principal preparation in the regular teaching load for leadership faculty. The university needs to consider school-based work in evaluating, promoting and rewarding faculty.

Create standards and training programs for mentor principals.

States should adopt standards for selecting, preparing and rewarding school principals who serve as mentors for aspiring principals during school-based internships. Above all, these mentors must be able to work with faculty, students, parents and the community to raise student achievement.

Strategy 4: Link principal licensure to performance.

Create a two-tier licensure system for school principals. For ***initial licensure*** *candidates would have to complete a preparation program focused on the core functions of successful schools. Within a specified time, those with initial licenses would have to earn* ***professional licenses*** *by demonstrating that they can lead improvements in school and classroom practices and in student achievement.*

If states want a large pool of highly effective school principals, policymakers need to change the licensure processes and adopt performance indicators that clearly document a school leader's ability to improve student achievement over time.

One strategy would replace current licensure systems with multi-tier, performance-based systems. In this design, *initial licenses* would be awarded to those who complete a redesigned program for principal preparation and then demonstrate (on an external exam) mastery of the program's curriculum. Those with initial licenses would be qualified to work as principals, assistant principals or lead teachers. These school leaders then would work toward *professional licenses*, which would be awarded after they have demonstrated that they can improve school performance.

Candidates for professional licenses would document their impact on student achievement through progress data, annual achievement data, portfolios and survey assessments. Surveys of supervisors, teachers and school staff would provide additional evidence of leadership. A panel of educational experts would assess the results before professional licenses are awarded.

When there is only one type of license for principals, it is impossible to tie principal certification to demonstrated performance. These licenses are based on grade-point averages or scores on licensure tests — measures that cannot assess the most essential competencies for instructional leadership, which can be gauged only by observing school leaders' on-the-job performance.

> A performance-based system may result in a smaller pool of professionally licensed school leaders. It may cost more. But it will provide the high-performing principals that schools need.

What are the issues?

Performance-based licensing is not for the faint at heart. Multi-tier, performance-based licensure systems require states to make new policies and new investments. Tying the second-tier, professional license to a principal's demonstrated leadership skills and record of results in improving school performance will require valid assessments, new personnel for coaching and mentoring, and panels of experts to check documents and screen portfolios.

Decisions about awarding professional licenses must be based on principals' performance but also must take into account their workplace challenges. For example, principals who lead schools in affluent communities may have less difficulty meeting on-the-job performance measures than do principals in high-need schools. The complexity of evaluating principals' levels of challenge is one reason that most states have been slow to link licensure to principals' ability to improve student achievement.

Policymakers need to create strong support systems for principals in the most challenging schools. This support should include mentoring and professional development opportunities that can help principals develop action-oriented leadership teams to address school problems. Where the school has significant "capacity" issues — inadequate policies, resources, district office and school board support, etc. — these issues need to be recognized and factored into the evaluation process.

Where do states now stand?

No SREB state issues licenses to principals based on demonstrated performance. Eight states (Arkansas, Delaware, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Tennessee and West Virginia) have two-tier systems that issue full licensure only after principals complete an induction period. Licensure is not based on the principals' ability to improve school practices and student achievement. Some states have well-developed orientation and induction programs that would be solid foundations upon which to build performance-based licensure systems.

What are some promising practices?

Kentucky offers initial licenses to candidates with leadership degrees and professional licenses based on a one-year induction program. During the induction period, principals receive on-the-job support that emphasizes school achievement. However, the Kentucky program stops short of evaluating principals' long-term effects on school practices and student achievement.

Arkansas' two-tier licensure process includes an orientation year, and Louisiana requires two-year internships for beginning principals. Both states support orientation and induction programs, and neither ties professional licensure to principals' ability to improve school practices and student achievement.

What can states do?

Establish a two-tier, performance-based licensure process for school principals.

Award initial licenses to those who complete high-quality preparation programs and earn satisfactory scores on a standards-based examination. Tie professional licensure to assessments of on-the-job performance. Initial licenses should be nonrenewable and valid for at least three years. Performance measurements should begin as soon as the person is employed in a leadership position (principal, assistant principal, lead teacher). The school leader's work during the period of initial licensure should be evaluated for evidence of his or her ability to improve student achievement — the basis for earning a professional license.

Provide support systems — through state leadership academies and universities — to help school leaders earn professional licenses.

During the initial years of employment, school leaders should receive coaching and support with the primary goal of helping them develop the skills to change schools and improve student achievement. State leadership academies and universities could bring together a network of colleagues to discuss real problems that schools face and to present possible solutions. Brainstorming with other principals who work in diverse settings is a powerful learning opportunity for new principals.

Develop reliable, valid assessments of principals' on-the-job performance.

In order to succeed, performance-based licensure systems must have valid, reliable assessments that measure principals' ability to lead school improvement. States need to develop valid, reliable ways to do the following:

- measure how principals affect teachers' classroom practices and student achievement;
- observe and collect data on principals in work settings; and
- determine what additional training principals need.

Creating such sophisticated assessment systems will be expensive. Several states might work together to develop and field-test assessment methods for performance-based licensure systems.

Strategy 5: Move accomplished teachers into school leadership positions.

Create an alternative certification program that provides a high level of support for accomplished teachers who are interested in becoming principals. This program would enable them to bypass traditional preparation and to prove themselves on the job. Limit participation in such programs to teachers with at least a master's degree, demonstrated leadership skills and proven records of increasing student achievement.

In the past states and local districts did not purposefully encourage outstanding teachers to become school leaders and to use their knowledge, experience and insight to improve student achievement. But times have changed. Today's environment of high-stakes accountability requires leaders who have demonstrated that they can help all students succeed. In interviews and focus group sessions, school superintendents have described accomplished teachers who they believe are better prepared to lead school improvement than many people holding principal certification.

What are the issues?

Who should be eligible for alternative principal licensure? States' alternative programs for principal licensure generally are directed at noneducators. Some policymakers believe that businesspeople and military personnel may be better equipped to lead schools — especially low-performing schools. These programs have attracted only a small number of career-switchers.

Many aspects of educational leadership make it unappealing to leaders in other careers. The work is difficult, the hours are long and the compensation is relatively modest. In addition, the media often paint schools as out-of-control environments that lack purpose or focus. It also may be that those who have achieved success in other occupations know that much of it was the result of the skills and knowledge they developed during many years in their chosen fields.

Alternative principal licensure can be a viable option. But a successful policy would emphasize the importance of identifying those with the skills and knowledge necessary to improve school practices and student achievement. A well-designed program would careful-

ly screen or recruit promising principal candidates, would provide beginning principals with a high level of support and would require them to demonstrate their ability to improve schools before granting them professional licenses.

In such a carefully crafted system, the largest pool of principal candidates will consist of accomplished teachers who already are improving student achievement. However, current licensing systems in most states make it difficult or impossible to tap this rich pool of potential principals.

Principal licensing systems discourage accomplished teachers. In virtually every state, a person must complete a university leadership preparation program and be recommended for licensure by the university faculty in order to become a principal. In many states, even someone who earns a license through an alternative program eventually must complete all or most of the required university coursework. These policies discourage high-performing teachers who otherwise might accept initial licensure as principals. These teachers already have demonstrated their leadership capabilities through their work on school and district leadership teams and by providing staff development to other teachers. Why should people with master's degrees and demonstrated leadership skills be required to return to universities and spend several years earning initial licenses?

Alternative licensing will not be enough. Alternative licensure policies alone will not attract high-performing principals to low-performing schools. In today's environment of high-stakes accountability, even the most dedicated leaders must believe they have a chance to succeed. They must see that the school board and the superintendent will provide the policies, resources and targeted assistance necessary to support a comprehensive school-improvement agenda. District leaders must convince prospective principals that they will have the authority to make difficult, unpopular decisions that are necessary to raise student achievement. States will have to work with superintendents and school board members to create working conditions that will attract leaders who can turn around struggling schools.

Where do states now stand?

Researching alternative licensure is difficult because states' definitions vary. Some states view alternative licensure as a means to attract career-switchers. Other state programs concentrate on recruiting people who already work in education. To attract nontraditional leaders, some states waive additional preparation requirements; others provide special preparation routes through universities or other entities. Several states use the term "alternative" to describe provisional licenses that are issued until candidates complete all traditional requirements for principal licensure.

No SREB state supports an alternative program that bypasses university preparation and awards initial principal licensure to people who have master's degrees and records of effective teaching and leadership. Maryland has an alternative program that makes it possible for new principals to earn permanent licenses by proving themselves on the job, but the program is cumbersome and seldom used. While 10 SREB states have some form of alternative certification, there is no evidence that these policies have produced significant numbers of new principals.

What are some promising practices?

Some SREB states have elements of comprehensive alternative-licensure policies upon which they could build effective systems.

Maryland offers alternative certificates to people who are recommended by school districts and who meet degree and experience requirements. The certificates may be converted to professional licenses after five years of continuous service. Candidates are not required to present evidence of accomplished teaching or leadership skills in order to receive initial certificates. The school board must appoint a mentor for each principal and must renew the alternative license in each of the five years by verifying that the principal's performance has improved school and student achievement. Only seven people have taken advantage of the program since it began in 1997. (Maryland appears to be the only SREB state to include a measure of on-the-job performance in its principal licensing system. Even so, on-the-job performance is a factor only in this little-used alternative program.)

Louisiana offers alternative certificates to educators who have master's degrees and Louisiana teaching certificates and who earn passing scores on the School Leaders Licensure Assessment. Candidates must enroll in a customized series of university courses based on reviews of their initial competencies. Candidates can bypass some courses if they demonstrate proficiency. Alternatively licensed principals who begin working in schools must enroll in a two-year induction program for school leaders.

Oklahoma offers alternative licensure to anyone with a master's degree who passes two tests, the Oklahoma Principal Common Core Test and a specialty test for elementary, middle or secondary certification. The state does not know how many people have been certified through this route. While this option offers important flexibility to potential school leaders, it could be improved by screening candidates for leadership qualities and evidence of improving student achievement.

Although Texas does not have alternative certificates for principals, it does permit potential principals to receive training through entities other than universities. Texas law allows regional education service centers, public school districts or other entities to develop principal preparation programs based on state guidelines and customized to meet candidates' needs. These programs may allow candidates to bypass some preparation requirements by substituting experience and professional training directly related to the state's seven standards for leadership.

What can states do?

Create alternative processes for principal licensure that allow master teachers to qualify for initial licenses.

States can award initial leadership licensure to teachers with master's degrees, demonstrated leadership skills, proven records of improving student achievement and a passion for high performance. Exemplary teachers who are reluctant to enter two- or three-year preparation programs may consider earning professional licenses while serving as principals.

Develop procedures for screening candidates and awarding initial licenses to those who complete alternative routes to become principals.

States can establish procedures and criteria for awarding alternative initial licensure. The procedures might include in-depth interviews by a panel, preparation and defense of portfolios that demonstrate candidates' leadership abilities, and other methods of assessing leadership potential and ability to raise student achievement. People who qualify for alternative initial licenses should meet the same conditions for professional licenses as do those who have completed traditional preparation programs.

Establish support systems for those who become principals through alternative routes.

Anyone who receives an alternative initial license should be supported as he or she makes the transition into school leadership. These new principals need at least the same level of support given to new principals who complete traditional preparation programs, and they need the same focus on improving schools and student achievement.

Strategy 6: Use state academies to cultivate leadership teams in middle-tier schools.

*Schools that rely on leadership **teams**, rather than on single-leader models, are most likely to improve student learning and "grow" future principals. Create state leadership academies that will cultivate school-based leadership teams and that will help these leaders develop the skills and knowledge to promote effective practices that will raise student achievement. Concentrate on serving **middle-tier** schools, which have lagging academic performance but rarely qualify for special assistance from state and federal programs.*

Most state accountability systems provide intensive help to the lowest-performing schools. Middle-tier schools — particularly those functioning just above the intervention level — share many problems with the lowest-performers but seldom get special assistance. There are hundreds of these schools in most states, and they cannot solve problems with student achievement unless they receive outside support. A carefully conceived and targeted intervention program for these schools could produce quick, significant gains in student achievement statewide.

One promising strategy to help middle-tier schools is to create state leadership academies that cultivate school-based leadership teams and equip them to solve their own problems. This strategy has two goals: (1) developing teams' capacity to lead and sustain improvement and (2) grooming team members who aspire to become school leaders.

What are the issues?

Teams, not individuals, change schools. Universities and leadership academies have worked exclusively to prepare individual leaders and have ignored research indicating that school-based leadership teams are the best way to improve student learning.

Programs that cultivate school leadership teams create more voices for change in the schools. Whether the programs prepare teams in academy settings, work with them in the schools or both, the goal is to establish knowledgeable groups within the schools that will lead others to improve student achievement. By focusing on teams, rather than on individu-

als, these programs help sustain long-term improvement. If principals leave, other school leaders can step up and continue the efforts.

Traditional academy training will not boost the achievement of low-performing schools. To work successfully with leadership teams in low-performing schools, academies will have to abandon their traditional curricula. State academies rarely build their curricula around comprehensive school-improvement designs. Instead, most offer menus of workshops with lots of "daily specials" — one-day training in management, leadership style, school climate, building safety, etc. The content of these workshops may be useful, but it will not prepare principals or leadership teams to accelerate learning and close achievement gaps.

In a high-quality academy curriculum, workshops and other activities are designed and sequenced carefully so that participants build the skills and knowledge to lead school reform. The curriculum is designed with teams — not individual leaders — in mind, and it blends academic study with hands-on problem-solving in the schools. Academy training should equip teams to identify learning gaps, raise standards, change instruction, provide support for students and assess the impact of new initiatives.

In this sharply focused professional development model, school teams and academy staff meet to identify critical problems with student achievement and then work together in the schools to find solutions. The teams occasionally return to the academy setting to reflect on their progress and to gain additional knowledge and skills. Between training sessions, coaches and mentors from the academy can help the teams through distance learning and on-site visits.

Who will benefit most from a high-quality academy program? State academy programs that focus on performance will cost more than the traditional one-day workshops. To maximize the impact of available funds, policymakers could concentrate on serving middle-tier schools that are not meeting academic standards. Many of these schools could improve quickly with guidance from well-trained, well-supported leadership teams.

Although some principals welcome the opportunity to take part in programs that will help them improve their schools, principals who most need the help often choose not to participate. Many states require their lowest-performing schools to participate in academy programs. State leaders could expand this requirement to struggling middle-tier schools and could emphasize the training of leadership teams, rather than individual leaders.

Should academies grant credit toward initial licensure? State leadership academies award professional development credit to those who complete the training. The credit typically applies to license renewal but does not count toward initial leadership licenses. Allowing academies to offer credit toward initial licensure may encourage more aspiring leaders to participate.

Any state academy that grants such credit will need enough funds and staff to support a high-quality program. The academy's curriculum should align with the same state standards for leadership that are addressed in university programs, and the academy — like the university — should be required to demonstrate that graduates can improve schools and student achievement.

Academies should be judged on performance. Leadership academies' traditional assessment systems must be changed so that state leaders can determine the academies' effectiveness. State academies now do little more than take attendance and ask participants whether they were satisfied with the training. These "satisfaction surveys" largely control the curricula. Academy training should improve how teams work to deliver high-quality curricula and instruction and how they use assessment results to analyze student learning, plan improvement actions and raise student achievement.

Where do states now stand?

Twelve SREB states (Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia) have made some progress in providing low-performing schools with access to state leadership academies, but no states have made substantial progress. These academies mostly have aimed at training individual principals rather than school teams.

What are some promising practices?

Several states have sharpened the focus of their leadership academies to emphasize training that results in higher school performance.

In Alabama — one of six states in SREB's State Leadership Academy Network — the State Department of Education has created a state leadership academy for low-performing schools. School and district teams are invited to participate in the Alabama State Academy by the state superintendent of schools. The academy curriculum focuses on improving schools' curricula, instruction and student achievement. Teams return to their schools, apply what they learned to school problems and share their work at the next academy session. The program is limited to about 50 of the state's lowest-performing schools.

The SREB leadership staff have worked closely with Georgia in designing the Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement (GLISI). The institute takes seven-member teams (led by superintendents and including principals, assistant principals and district staff) through a three-year program on leading school improvement. Training helps each leader create, launch and monitor an improvement initiative. Leaders analyze data to uncover the root causes of problems. They also examine their schools' curricula and instruction, classroom assessments, professional development, use of technology and academic expectations of students. As they

"The Alabama Leadership Academy has been the most beneficial endeavor I have participated in as a high school principal. The materials, books and information we receive can be taken back and used in our schools. In fact, the programs are designed to directly improve the school setting. Through my participation in the state leadership academy, my leadership staff and I are paying much closer attention to quality instruction. When my team and I return from an academy session, we share what we learned. For example, we spend much more time in classrooms doing observations and providing feedback to teachers. Staff meetings are now used for professional development rather than for announcements. We spend a lot of time on staff development to help teachers engage students in challenging assignments and manage their classrooms so that they can teach from bell to bell. And we have developed a ninth-grade academy where teachers have students and planning time in common. The Alabama Leadership Academy has proven to be an extremely useful vehicle to improving the quality of education in my high school. In the last two years, we have gone from less than 50 percent of students passing the state high school graduation exam the first time to more than 75 percent; and we have raised our status from an Alert 2 school to a Caution school."
Evelyn Baugh, Principal, Ensley High School, Alabama

work on district and school-improvement plans, participants receive ongoing support from other local team members, from district school-improvement coordinators and from institute consultants. They report their progress and results in portfolios that are shared with other district teams.

The Louisiana State Department of Education has established professional learning-community institutes for low-performing schools. These institutes bring school teams together to develop and implement strategies to improve student achievement and to implement standards-based curricula. Louisiana requires principals to be team members.

SREB State Leadership Academy Network

The State Leadership Academy Network aims to help states design academy programs for school leadership teams from schools that do a poor job of getting students to succeed yet do not qualify for intensive, focused help under accountability programs. The intent is to prepare teams — composed of current and aspiring principals and teacher leaders — that can apply research-based knowledge to improve curricula, instructional practices and student achievement.

Every leadership academy in the network agrees to:

- enroll teams — each of which must consist of current and future school leaders, teacher leaders and at least one representative from the district office — from schools that are just above those identified as low-performing;
- work with SREB to design and develop curriculum modules that help leadership teams learn to apply research-based knowledge and processes in addressing real problems that impede school improvement;
- help school districts identify potential leaders with demonstrated leadership ability, knowledge of curriculum and instruction, and proven records of high performance;
- recruit instructors and coaches who know what it takes to transform low-performing schools and who can help schools apply research-based knowledge to improve school and classroom practices;
- work with universities or state agencies to offer academy-based leadership programs that count toward professional leadership licensure and/or renewal;
- conduct research in the schools to determine whether the academy program is producing leaders who are improving student achievement;
- work with networks of schools' leadership development teams so that they may learn from one another; and
- create an advisory board that meets frequently and that includes state educational leaders who are involved in comprehensive school improvement, business leaders, and successful leaders of schools and school systems who have improved student achievement significantly.

What can states do?

Create leadership academies that target middle-tier schools with poor academic performance.

States should establish leadership academies that help teams from struggling middle-tier schools become engines for reform. These school teams should include principals, aspiring leaders (such as assistant principals or curriculum specialists), teacher leaders and district leaders. The academies should offer coherent curricula that help school teams understand school and classroom practices that improve student achievement. Teams should learn how to work with faculty to incorporate standards into the curricula; how to improve assignments given to students; and how to use data to drive change. The academy curricula should take at least two years. Once teams complete a training segment, they return to their schools and apply those concepts and skills in solving real problems.

Select knowledgeable, experienced people to be instructors, coaches and mentors in leadership academies.

States must recruit academy instructors with personal experience in changing schools and raising student achievement. These instructors must know effective, research-based school practices and strategies for change. Support staffs of mentors and coaches can help school teams implement what they are learning.

Ask state leadership academies, universities and licensure agencies to develop plans to allow training in the academies to count toward initial principal certification.

Teachers and other aspiring leaders who participate on school teams that are enrolled in academies should be able to earn credit toward their initial licenses as principals if that leadership training meets state standards.

Determine the effectiveness of leadership academies by measuring whether those trained through them are able to improve school practices and student achievement.

Like the schools they serve, state leadership academies should be assessed based on their performance. States need to develop measures to determine whether leadership training results in school improvement. Data collection should focus on changes in what students are taught, how they are taught, what is expected of them and how the school helps all students succeed.

Conclusion

State leaders need to bring together all the parties concerned with principal preparation to plan ways to work together to do the following:

- build the pool of high-achieving principal candidates;
- accelerate the redesign of principal preparation programs;
- make field-based experiences a central focus of principal preparation programs;
- link principal licensure to performance;
- move accomplished teachers into principal positions; and
- sharpen the focus of state leadership academies and cultivate leadership teams in middle-tier schools.

Each state should choose its best forum. In one state, the best way to accomplish change may be for the chief state school officer or chancellor of higher education to convene a group of higher education leaders, business and industry leaders, state education agency staff, and representatives of key school groups and citizen groups. In another state, the best way may be for the higher education board to develop a special task group or working conference. Another state may choose to have the legislature create a study group to suggest legislative actions.

Whatever the forum used, every state needs to work hard to cooperate with and support universities, leadership academies and districts in enacting the six strategies to ensure that schools are led by effective principals who know how to improve student achievement.

Southern Regional Education Board Goals for Education

1. All children are ready for the first grade.
2. Achievement in the early grades for all groups of students exceeds national averages and performance gaps are closed.
3. Achievement in the middle grades for all groups of students exceeds national averages and performance gaps are closed.
4. All young adults have a high school diploma — or, if not, pass the GED tests.
5. All recent high school graduates have solid academic preparation and are ready for postsecondary education and a career.
6. Adults who are not high school graduates participate in literacy and job-skills training and further education.
7. The percentage of adults who earn postsecondary degrees or technical certificates exceeds national averages.
8. Every school has higher student performance and meets state academic standards for all students each year.
9. Every school has leadership that results in improved student performance — and leadership begins with an effective school principal.
10. Every student is taught by qualified teachers.
11. The quality of colleges and universities is regularly assessed and funding is targeted to quality, efficiency and state needs.
12. The state places a high priority on an education system of schools, colleges and universities that is accountable.

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